

# The Olympic Peninsula

A very young, unique *circular* mountain range, isolated for eons by glacial ice, and later the waters of the Salish Sea, the Olympic Peninsula has developed its own distinct array of plants and animals. With stunning **ancient forest**, amazing rugged **ocean beaches**, spectacular glacier capped **mountains**, lush **rainforest**, **waterfalls**, **hot springs**, wilderness hiking, fifteen river systems, seven distinct climates, spectacular ecosystems and lots of wildlife, with a roadless **National Park**, **World Heritage Site** and **UN Biosphere Reserve** the Peninsula is everything that makes Western Washington so special. The Peninsula has a conflicting history of conservation and logging. And while it is undoubtedly lush, you will see plenty of clearcuts and logging families.

Park admission, good for 7 full days, is \$10 per car-full or \$5 per person (\$30 annual pass). In winter admission is rarely collected. The main Park Visitor Center is open daylight hours, daily in summer, weekends in winter and is one mile from US 101 in Port Angeles (3002 Mount Angeles Road) Call 360/565-3130 for recorded info. There are no roads through the heart of the park although US highway 101 skirts the edges and about a dozen park roads enter the edges of the wilderness, allowing day access; sporadic winter road closures are possible, Call 360/565-3131 for recorded road and weather information.

## Special Places

**PACIFIC OCEAN BEACH at LaPush** This is not a placid white sand beach! Big waves, huge seastacks and cliffs, driftwood the size of large boats, dramatic weather, huge tides and not a building in sight – the spectacular coast section of the Park is an amazing place! All along the rocky beaches are wonderful tidepools teeming with life. LaPush is about 12 miles off the highway (near Forks) and is accessible by public bus; the Quileute Indian tribe rents cabins and rooms. Take a short walk down Rialto Beach to Hole-in-the-wall or take a long, long walk – but be sure to consult a tide table!

**Makah Cultural Center** The tribe's museum of the archaeological remnants of a pre-Colombian, Makah village attracts visitors from around the world, it may be the best on the continent. Artwork, culture and artifacts from daily life fill the architecturally beautiful building on the Makah Indian Reservation in Neah Bay at Cape Flattery. We recommend it highly. Cape Flattery is the northwestern tip of the USA and the view down to the ocean is fantastic. The views from SR 112, the road to Neah Bay, are amazing, in fact, it is officially a *National Scenic Byway*. Neah Bay is accessible by public bus.

**Hoh RAINFOREST** Six foot thick moss, 500 year old trees, deep, thick green everywhere and as much life packed in as possible, the temperate rainforest is stunning, and at over 300 inches of rain a year, very wet. The Hoh river runs through a valley that is 4000 feet high in places (that's what catches all the rain!) In the National Park, the Hoh Visitor Center, 360/374-6925, is 30 miles off the highway near Forks. You can walk a 10 minute nature trail in the rainforest, or set out on the Hoh trail for a hour or a week (it ends on Blue Glacier on Mt Olympus)! There is a private hostel nearby 360/374-2270.

**Lake Ozette & the Ozette Triangle** A great, off the beaten path, place to see both the rainforest and the ocean beach is at Ozette, an hour's drive off the highway near Neah Bay. An easy but slippery (boardwalk) 3 mile walk through the boggy rainforest takes you to gorgeous truly isolated beaches. A walk along the beach and a second boardwalk give you the option of a spectacular 9 mile round trip!

**Sol Duc HOT SPRINGS** Twelve miles off the highway up the Soleduck road, only ¼ mile from the end of the road, is Sol Duc falls, one of the most spectacular waterfalls you'll ever see. There are several trails in this corner of the rainforest, including one that gets you, in only 8 strenuous miles, above tree-line in beautiful alpine lakes. At the road-end there is wonderful natural, outdoor Hot Springs resort (closed winter!) with a campsite and cabins.

**Lake Crescent** A remnant of the last ice age, this gorgeous very deep mountain lake is mere inches from US highway 101 for about 30 miles. There are a couple of hiking trails accessible directly from the highway (or public bus): Marymere Falls (flat, short & beautiful) and Storm King Mountain (tall and strenuous). The trail behind (north of) the lake is being turned into part of the Port Townsend-to-Forks Olympic Discovery bicycle trail and is very beautiful.

**Hurricane Ridge VIEWPOINT** Fifteen miles off the highway at Port Angeles, is the only way to really drive into the park, you can actually take the paved road to over 5300 ft /1600 m (it's a GREAT bike ride!) to the lodge and hiking trails at the top. On a clear day the view of the mountain range (south) is exceptional and the view north (Victoria BC) is sublime. Open daylight hours only, daily in summer and weekends in winter, weather permitting.

**Port Townsend** Once a thriving Victorian seaport, Port Townsend's destiny changed suddenly when the railroad chose to end at Tacoma. It is now a small, friendly, artsy town with fantastic views, great architecture, a fun, funky culture and festivals most weekends. It is not to be missed. In summer there are boats to the San Juan Islands & Victoria, kayak and sailboat rentals in town. This is a town with the slogan: "We're all here, because we're not all there." Port Townsend is 20 miles off the highway and is easily accessible by public bus. There's a nice HI hostel in town 360-685-0655.

**Backcountry TREKKING** Of course the best way to see a wilderness like this is to take a backpack and tent and walk deep into the mountains for several days. Olympic is one of the best places for backpacking! There are hundreds of miles of trails. Some suggestions of particularly nice (although popular) routes are the Hoh trail, the Sol Duc trail to the amazing 7 Lakes region (you can connect up from the Hoh to Sol Duc via 7 lakes, go in at one place and out the other – recommended!). Also Enchanted Valley from Lake Quinalt is amazing. And backpacking on the beach, either from Ozette, Neah Bay or LaPush is also a fantastic experience. For a spectacular and very rarely used rainforest hike that i love, try the Bogachiel river trail just north of Forks.

You must have a map, a tent with rain-fly, rain gear and a stove (fires are not allowed). For beach hikes a tide table is required! Backcountry permits and camping space reservations are also required, \$5 plus \$2 per night per person (Wilderness Information Center 360/565-3100). There are black bears and cougars in the forest, so you must store your food in a way that doesn't attract them. Upstairs in the Seattle REI store just 12 blocks from the hostel is a National Park/Forest information center with rangers to answer questions and sell permits. Metzger Maps 1 block from the hostel on 1st Ave has all of the detailed hiking maps (Green Trails & USGS 7.5 minute).

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## Getting there

You can bike, drive, take connecting city busses or a coach to the Peninsula. Although the geography is pretty straight forward (one circular road, mountains in the center and salt water outside) a map is pretty important. Remember that distances are quite significant, at 23,000 sq. km the Peninsula is slightly smaller than the country of Belgium, and sometimes there is nothing at all for long stretches of road (there are no services after Port Angeles, except in Forks!)

A day trip to the Peninsula is rather difficult, and even then is only possible with a car. Although the area is primarily rural, city buses cover most of the Peninsula, (it's about \$9 all the way to LaPush) see the **Northern Olympic Peninsula Bus Connections** Handout. Although the bus will get you out there, getting off the highway/bus route and into the fun places, can be challenging. Hooking up with other travelers who have a car is usually the best way. Ask at hostels about van trips or shuttles. In Forks & PA there are taxis that will take you into the park. Windsox Trailhead Shuttle in Forks, 360/374-2002, is a good option. There is also a car rental place in Port Angeles.

To drive from Seattle, take the Bainbridge Island Ferry and then SR 305 (straight off the ferry) across the island and the Agate Passage bridge to Poulsbo. Just past Poulsbo go right on route 3, which looks like a freeway, but quickly turns to a 2 lane highway. About 10 miles later go left on SR 104 which is the Hood Canal Bridge; go right on route 19 to Port Townsend or straight on to US 101. US 101 makes a complete 450 mile circle around the Olympic mountains and will take you to everywhere else. *It is 5 hours, or more, by car from downtown Seattle to LaPush or the Hoh Rainforest Visitor's Center.*

## overnight

**HOSTELS:** HI-Port Townsend 360/385-0655, Port Angeles ThorTown 360/452-0931, HI-Marrowstone Island 360/385-1288, Hoh Rainforest 360/374-2270

**CABINS** under \$100: LaPush Oceanside Cabins 360/374-5267, Log Cabin Resort at Lake Crescent 360/928-3325

**CABINS** over \$100: Sol Duc 360/327-3583, Kalaloch 360/962-2271, Lake Quinault 360/288-2535

**AFFORDABLE MOTELS:** can be found in Forks, LaPush, Neah Bay, Port Angeles, Sekiu, Sequim. Numerous B&B's dot the Peninsula.

Check <http://www.forkswa.com/2.html> for complete listings. In Forks and Port Angeles it is possible to just show up, otherwise you probably should have reservations. Most everything is discounted in the winter.

**CAMPGROUNDS:** There are many campgrounds, some public in the National Park or National Forest and many private, some are opened year round, but in the summer all fill up very quickly. Except on the National Park beach, you **CANNOT** free camp anywhere on the Peninsula, it is illegal and very dangerous.

## other sights

**Suquamish Museum, Chief Seattle's Grave & Old Man House State Park** Quite near to Seattle is a small, but very well done Native American museum, the Suquamish Museum on the Port Madison Indian Reservation near Poulsbo. The exhibits are powerful and give a glimpse into the life of the Salish people before, during and after the arrival of the Europeans. A mile away is Chief Seattle's grave. *Take the ferry 30 minutes to Bainbridge Island and catch the #90 bus at the ferry terminal for the 15 minute ride to the reservation.*

**Hood Canal Floating Bridge** As you head west from Poulsbo or Kingston you will cross a one mile long floating concrete bridge spanning a 600 foot deep fjord with daily 16 foot tides! The view is amazing from the bridge, and watch for the effects of the wind. Keep an eye open for submarines.

**Port Gamble** is a pretty little village built to resemble a quaint New England town. The timber mill closed in the mid-1990s and it's becoming more of a tourist destination. Nice views - a nice place for a snack or picnic. It is less than a mile beyond the Hood Canal Bridge on SR 3.

**Chimicum & Marrowstone Island** On the way to Port Townsend keep your eyes opened: The Chimicum café has legendary berry pies and the HI hostel on Marrowstone Island might have the most beautiful location of an hostel in the USA.

**Dungeness Spit** moving west on US 101, near Sequim (pronounced SKWIM), is a 7 mile sand jetty & bird sanctuary that is a very is a pretty walk.

**Port Angeles** is a small, conservative, industrial city. Based primarily on timber and a coast guard base, it is very slowly turning more towards tourism. The 8 block downtown area is somewhat moribund, but is looking up. Port Angeles is notable only as a way to get to other places, ferries to Victoria BC leave from downtown, the main National Park visitor's center is in town and there are a number of motels and a nice, private hostel called ThorTown 360/452-0931.

**Elwha** Just past Port Angeles is another entrance to the park with good hiking prospects. Along boulder creek, a 2½ mile walk from the road-end there is a natural hot springs, shallow muddy pools in the forest maintained by local people. (Nudity is common at these hot springs).

**Forks** Farthest west is a logging town slowly changing from it's passionate devotion to timber to a tourist center. A somewhat bland, wet, town, Forks has the only grocery, restaurants & gas stations for 100 miles in either direction and numerous rustic affordable motels. It's a good base or stop for re-supplying.

**Lake Quinault** South of Forks is a very pretty lake in the rainforest, and the start of the 30 mile Enchanted Valley trail (valley of 10,000 waterfalls!)

**Hood Canal** For 40 miles, from Union to Quilcene, US 101 winds along this gorgeous fjord where 7000 mountains drop directly into the water.

**Staircase** on the south east side of the Park near the south part of Hood Canal offers more nice hiking and camping options! Mt Ellinor is a great hike!

**Quilcene & Mount Walker** The tiny town of Quilcene has several nice "dry" side hikes such as the Big Quil or Notch Pass (see ranger station) and just south of town is a small, water side mountain with a road to the summit and amazing views of Seattle.